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terms, as an African rejection of Arab dominance: 'Africa's Service to the World' (1880), in Blyden, 1887: 122.

[6]See especially Kidd, 1908. Kidd's concept of 'Kafir Socialism' was developed in the context of explaining the alleged cultural obstacles to capitalist economic development (and especially the mobilisation of African labour) in South Africa.

[7]The term 'Yoruba' was locally and originally applied only to the Ọyọ, who were consequently often designated (by Johnson among others) as the 'Yoruba Proper'. The first use of 'Yoruba' as 'the general name of the country', including other groups than the Ọyọ, seems to have been by Raban, 1830-2: III, 10.

[8]For the 'cultural nationalism' assimilation of traditional religion and Christianity, see further Ayandele, 1966: 264-5; Law, 1983: 112.

[9]Horton, 1868; for the parallel with Britain and the Romans, see ibid.: 26. Horton's concept of race and its relation to culture, which differed from Blyden's in denying the existence of inherited and fixed racial differences, is usefully discussed by Fyfe, 1972: 69-74.

The invention of the Yorubas: regional and pan-African nationalism versus ethnic provincialism

Michel R. Doortmont

According to E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, traditions as we see them now are without exception constructs 'of a novel type for quite novel purposes' that have little to do with the past and everything with the present. The most important link with the past is not to be found in some historical basis of tradition, but in the use of historical materials for the construction of tradition. According to Hobsbawm, 'a large store of such materials is accumulated in the past of any society, and an elaborate language of symbolic practice and communication is always available' (Hobsbawm, 1983: 6).

The theme of the conference for which this paper was originally written took its starting point from Hobsbawm's theory, as is reflected in two questions: (1) How were early ethnic and national identities invented, out of what materials, and selected from the resources of 'tradition' according to what principles?, and (2) In West Africa, what were the interests and presuppositions of the proto-élite who did the inventing?[1] In both Hobsbawm's theoretical premisses, and the general questions asked above, the intentionality of the invention of traditions is a major factor. The theoretical notion of intentionality is to my mind not always too self-evident when applied to empirical examples, however, as I will try to show in this paper with regard to the Yoruba.[2]

As a starting point, I would like to argue that in the case of the Yoruba the invention of 'early ethnic and national identities' was only partly a conscious process. The *necessity* to develop a new identity after the wars of the nineteenth century and the breaking up of existing geographical, social and political structures set in motion an evolutionary process that would lead eventually to the formation of an ethnic group called 'the Yoruba'. In this process there was room for active manipulation of the past, politics, culture and other basic ingredients of society, but the initial conditions were rather rigidly set. Large communities of liberated slaves in Brazil and Sierra Leone, uprooted from their home for an extended period of time, complete communities resettled within the Yoruba country due to incessant wars, the wars themselves, which nurtured a situation of insecurity for decennia on end, and missionary and colonial presence in combination set the boundaries within which the actors could play their respective roles.

Among the many conscious actors, the Christian missionaries were certainly not the least important. As J. D. Y. Peel has stated in a recent paper, it was the

> body of work produced by the Christian Yoruba intelligentsia - the creation of an orthography and a literary language, the translation of the Scriptures, local and ethnic histories large and small, written in English and Yoruba, studies of Yoruba traditional religion variously interpretative, polemical or historical - through which the Yoruba have come to know themselves precisely as such

and he adds: 'That we study a people called "the Yoruba" at all is due largely to them' (Peel, 1989: 198). Peel's ideas tie in with those of V. Y. Mudimbe, who marks the missionary discourse as one of the stronger influences on the development of modern African systems of thought (or the African *gnosis* as he calls it: Mudimbe, 1988: 47-54, 183-6). In his work Mudimbe emphasises the factor 'consciousness' when discussing the formation of an African *gnosis*, but adds to it the factor 'setting' as discussed above. An example is the African resistance against colonialism, especially intellectual colonialism, which found an outlet in the ideology of pan-African nationalism (Mudimbe, 1988: 75-80).

If we talk about the Yoruba in the nineteenth century, the terminology used is definitely anachronistic. As far as we can establish now, the Yoruba did not have a common ethnic and cultural identity in the first half of the nineteenth century; they most likely saw themselves as Ọyọ, Ijẹṣa, Ondo, Ẹgba, Ijẹbu, or Ekiti. National identity was at most equated with town identity, cultural identity with common traditions of origin.[3] In the diaspora, following the civil wars of the early nineteenth century, both in Brazil and in Sierra Leone, these small groups of Yoruba (to use an anachronism) in all their ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, were thrown together out of necessity. In a strange and chaotic new society, one tends to look for friends and partners among people one has common traits with. At the same time the outside world will emphasise the commonality of traits in people rather than point out differences.[4] In this process a proto-national identity can easily develop, as it did among the Yoruba of Sierra Leone. Only after a distinct Yoruba, or Aku, as they were called in Sierra Leone, identity was established among the Sierra Leoneans, first in Freetown and later in Lagos, did the identity issue become a conscious one. In the latter place the Sierra Leoneans were supported by Brazilian returnees who also had acquired a common identity.

When Crowther published his *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* in 1843, he could speak of the Yoruba, because by then an ethnic entity of that name had been defined. Crowther was most likely the person that actually coined the term Yoruba. He was one of the earliest missionaries to use the word as a generic term for all the subgroups and through the combination of his birth (he was born near Iṣẹyin in the Yoruba heartland), his numerous publications and his

position in the Church Missionary Society, Crowther greatly influenced the way in which missionary circles defined the notion in later years.[5] I do not agree with Peel's views on the inauguration of the term in England by 'travellers who were oriented towards ...Hausa'. It was the early C.M.S. missionaries, active among the Yoruba, and knowledgeable in Hausa, who first used the term generically. This derivative of the Hausa name for the Ọyọ-Yoruba became popular through these C.M.S. missionaries who studied Hausa language and culture and were meant to start a mission in Hausaland. When this project failed, they came to work in Yorubaland in the 1840s. Apart from Crowther we can mention J. F. Schön here, Crowther's companion on the Niger expedition of 1841. Their immediate use of the word, rather than an historical connection twenty years older, gave it its modern meaning.

In the second half of the nineteenth century a characteristic Yoruba élite was formed in Lagos; westernised, educated, and with a distinct group identity, they were Yoruba in the modern sense of the word.[6] This Yoruba élite had a definite need for a distinctive cultural identity, especially after 1880, when their economic and professional position became increasingly disadvantageous, due to a growing attitude of racial prejudice and the formation of a formal colonial administrative structure (Doortmont, 1984). They found themselves in a position of relative deprivation vis-à-vis the Europeans and were determined to reassert their position.

In a society under pressure, with individuals under pressure, a common identity is extremely helpful. From the 1880s onwards we see several authors set out to construct a functional model of Yoruba 'national' history in an attempt to emancipate their social group. One example of this approach is J. O. George's *Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country*, published in 1895.[7] George consistently treated the Yoruba hinterland as one entity, a 'Kingdom', or even a 'Nation', taking note of ethnic divisions, but smoothing them over at the same time. When he says that 'the Yoruba country was one of the most powerful kingdoms in Interior West Africa', George is not referring to Ọyọ, but to a united Yoruba people, '...computed to be about 4,000,000' in number, and inhabiting the area '... bounded on the north by the Niger and Hausa countries, on the south by Benin, on the east by Kakanda, and on the west by the Dahomian Kingdom and the Atlantic Ocean' (George, 1895: 15).

Further scrutiny of George's text makes it clear that there was an ideological problem in defining a Yoruba identity on the basis of historical materials. Political context and sources just did not add up. There was no Yoruba national tradition outside Lagos and therefore oral traditions and accounts on this level of abstraction did not exist. They were organised around the component communities, the Yoruba sub-groups. George was himself of Ẹgba descent and active in a body

called the Abẹokuta Patriotic Association in the 1880s.[8] Politically he can therefore hardly be identified as a Yoruba nationalist. Nevertheless, in his work he claimed to write national history (1895: 18-20). What is more, as a framework of nationality, he used the history of the strongest sub-group, Ọyọ, in contradiction to his political and ethnic allegiances. To balance this he emphasised in the first place the cultural homogeneity of all Yoruba: 'It is beyond doubt that the Ẹgbas, Ketus, Ọyọs, with their subdivisions etc., are of one stock; their manners and customs agree; what is held sacred in one town is held sacred by all of them without exception' (1895: 18). Secondly, he redefined the Ọyọ empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in terms of an homogeneous 'Yoruba Kingdom'. Rather than talking about Ọyọ exercising political and military control over the different Yoruba sub-groups within its boundaries, he stressed the fact that 'the Yoruba Kingdom [that] was once a great power in West Africa ... had Dahomey, Hausa, Tapa, and many other important tribes and countries under its control'.

Thirdly, George concludes that it was external factors that brought down the 'Yoruba Kingdom' so constructed, not only in the nineteenth century, but also on an earlier occasion some two and a half centuries before. As far as the nineteenth century was concerned, on the one hand '... destructive wars occasioned by invasions of the Fulanis in their efforts to propagate the Moslem Faith in Yorubaland...' are presented as the cause for its demise (1895: 16), while on the other hand, the Europeans played their role as well:

> European slavers visiting the Coast supplied Rum, Gin and Powder to the Lagos people, who bartered them for slaves at the Ijebu market ... The Ijebus themselves, ... supplied Maye, the Balogun of Ife with these new implements of war, in return of which they were supplied with captives of war.
>
> The appetite for war and slave-raiding received considerable impetus from these modern destructive weapons ... and by the enormous gain accruing from the sales of captives of war as slaves to the Europeans through the markets (1895: 19).

George's approach can be qualified as 'regional nationalism', cosmopolitan in outlook but with a general ethnic bias. The most interesting aspect of this approach is that it seemingly transcended minor ethnic boundaries and squabbles, that were the order of the day in colonial Lagos in the 1870s and 1880s. Although himself politically active in his 'home-town' of Abẹokuta, George apparently had no problem in presenting a nationalist outlook on the Yoruba past, and thereby also its future. One could dismiss George's attempt at writing national history as spurious, because the traditional history of the Yoruba by nature contained a bias towards the fragmentation of Yoruba identity. This is however not an answer to the question why

George so strongly emphasised national characteristics in the Yoruba past.

In the same school of thought with George we find Samuel Johnson, whose *The History of the Yorubas* has become the archetype of the regional nationalist approach to Yoruba history. The problems George was faced with also apply to Johnson, albeit slightly modified. The technical problem of sources organised around the individual Yoruba communities was the same. When we consider cultural and political allegiances, however, we see some marked differences between George and Johnson. In a way, Samuel Johnson was not part of the Lagos élite. Although of Sierra Leonean descent, he came to Ibadan when he was twelve years old and lived there and in Ọyọ for the rest of his life. In many ways, therefore, he did not share the 1880s concern of the Lagos élite, namely to profile a cultural identity vis-à-vis the British. Johnson looked for a political identity for the whole of Yorubaland, in which the indigenous population, the educated élite, and the British all had their place.[9] On the other hand, Johnson was deeply influenced by the ideas of the Lagos élite. All his brothers lived in Lagos, as did many of his friends and acquaintances. He was educated in the best of Anglican traditions, as was a considerable part of the Lagos élite, and in later life he travelled to Lagos regularly, for leisure, study, and during the 1880s as an intermediary for the colonial government.[10] Because of this 'double' background, Johnson's work is uniquely holistic, and when it was published in 1921, twenty-four years after its completion, it represented a view that was already quite out of date.

George claimed to be writing the history of the Yorubas, but he gave in fact a series of short histories. Johnson chose a different solution to the problem of source materials and wrote a rather more homogeneous story strongly based on the history of Ọyọ and Ibadan, substituting Ọyọ and Ibadan for Yoruba, and neglecting the other Yoruba groups.

It would be too easy to deconstruct both George and Johnson into local historians; it would also be wrong to do so. When they wrote their books social, political and cultural factors precluded the writing of local histories. Within the group of educated Yoruba in Lagos and elsewhere, as well as within the Christian missions and the colonial apparatus the tendency was to think about the Yorubas in national terms. All parties were convinced that progress and civilisation only had a chance if there was at least some sense of unison among all Yoruba. Johnson was rather explicit about this and in *The History* he actually drew a blue-print of a future Yoruba nation.[11] His strong bias towards Ọyọ can be explained partly by his ethnic background, but one should also take into account that the history of the legendary Ọyọ empire served easily as a model for a new and viable type of political

organisation in a country torn by war. How else can we explain the fact that George, himself an Ẹgba, took the Ọyọ empire as an example?

When, after 1890, the educated Yoruba found out that they had little to expect from the British, a new generation stood up and turned towards the indigenous population. Many of them had strong links with the hinterland through birth or station, rather than with Lagos. I. B. Akinyẹle in Ibadan, E. M. Lijadu in both Abẹokuta and Ondo, and Adebesin Fọlarin, A. K. Ajiṣafẹ, and J. B. O. Losi in Abẹokuta are examples of this generation.[12] They developed what I would call an 'ethnic provincialist' approach to history, which was more in line with the views the indigenous political élites held on Yoruba society, or rather societies. In part this shift can be explained in terms of the recognition of difficulties posed by the source materials, but the change had ideological grounds also.

Once the indigenous political élites got a say in the construction of a new political framework under British supervision ('taking off' around the turn of the century) educated Yoruba jumped at the opportunities to act in an advisory capacity to local rulers. An early example is H. Atundaolu, who published his Ijẹṣa history in 1901 in accordance with the views of the Ọwa (king) of Ileṣa.[13] At times this approach could take absurd dimensions, as in the case of Fọlarin, who argued for a self-governed Yoruba state under British overrule, completely centered on the Ẹgba and with Abẹokuta as its capital. He stated that Abẹokuta was to Yorubaland what London was to Britain (Fọlarin, n.d.).

The ethnic provincialist approach was, however, successful, in that it gave individuals a chance to achieve positions of power within the colonial system. This was especially the case in Abẹokuta, where a strong Ẹgba nationalist movement had existed since the 1860s. Because of the proximity to Lagos, and its fragmented nature (Ẹgba nationality was itself a construct of sub-groups thrown together in the wars of the nineteenth century) Abẹokuta stands out. Later on, towards the 1930s the ethnic provincialist approach became more widespread. Examples are I. B. Akinyẹle in Ibadan, who eventually became the first educated Olubadan (king) of Ibadan in 1955, N. D. Oyerinde in Ogbomọṣọ, and P. A. Afọlabi in Ọyọ.[14]

At the other end of the spectrum we find pan-African nationalists like Herbert Macaulay and Ladipọ Ṣolankẹ of the West African Students Union (Olusanya 1982). They too addressed themselves to Yoruba history and the problems of a Yoruba nation, but they invariably did so from a much wider perspective. Macaulay's collection of historical papers shows us that he did not limit himself to the Yoruba, although his predominant interest lay here. A good example is the Eshugbayi Eleko court case. Eshugbayi Eleko, the Ọba (king) of Lagos was bereft of all his privileges by the British in the

1920s, on the grounds that his predecessor Dosunmu had ceded the territory to the British. When Eshugbayi Eleko protested, he was first imprisoned and later banned. Macaulay took up his case, and saw it eventually through to the Privy Council in London amidst much publicity.[15] The case was won, and Eshugbayi Eleko was reinstated as Ọba in 1931(Fọlami, 1982: 41-54). Although the dispute started at a local political level, Macaulay transformed it into an ideological issue, a struggle of the oppressed African against his colonial master.

In 1931, Ṣolankẹ wrote a local history of Abẹokuta, on the occasion of the centennial celebrations of the town. In it he addressed much wider issues than Abẹokuta history, and this brought him immediately in conflict with one of the most prolific provincialists, A. K. Ajiṣafẹ.[16] The ensuing discussion between the two men is rather amusing, and gives us a good insight into their different points of view, emanating from completely different geographical and academic positions: Ṣolankẹ in London, concerned with West African students and matters of imperial colonial politics; Ajiṣafẹ in Abẹokuta, a local educationalist and musician, concerned with local politics.

If we try to make up an interim balance, it seems that after 1940 the provincialist approach has gained the upper hand. On the national level Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ with his Ẹgbẹ-ọmọ-Oduduwa movement of the 1940s successfully linked on to the provincialist ideas, and on the local level each and every Yoruba community has since the administrative reorganisations of the 1930s been trying to gain as much as possible from strengthening at the expense of its neighbours; the towns of Ibadan and Ogbomọṣọ for instance have managed to gain an Ọbaship through this approach.[17] Pan-African nationalism has completely disappeared as a viable political ideology.

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[1]I wish to thank the participants in the CWAS 'Self-assertion and Brokerage' conference for their valuable additions and corrections to this paper. Original research for this paper undertaken in Nigeria was made possible by a grant from the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the co-operation of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

[2]The examples given in Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) emphasise the concept of intentionality also for colonial Africa. The article on Africa is mainly concerned with the relationship between colonial authority and indigenous populations, and the accommodation of the former by the latter. It does not discuss the formation of identities as such (T. Ranger, 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa' in Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 211-62).

[3]The edifice 'national' is of course also an anachronism; see the discussion below.

[4]Cf. Peel (1989).

[5]Cf. Peel (1989), Schön and Crowther (1970: 139, 317-20 passim). According to R. C. C. Law (personal communication, June 1988) J. Raban published *A Vocabulary of the Eyo* [or Ọyọ] *Language* in the early 1830s, in which he used Yoruba as a generic form for the language group. I do not think that this weakens my argument, however, as Raban's work had no immediate influence. The final choice was made by the incorporation of the term into everyday language. This happened in the 1840s through the agencies indicated above.

[6]Cf. Kopytoff (1965) and Mann (1985).

[7]George (n.d. [1895]). Although published in 1895, the text of the book originated from a series of lectures held in 1884.

[8]Personal communication R. C. C. Law, June 1988.

[9]Cf. Doortmont (1985: 19-29).

[10]Ibid. 4-18.

[11]Ibid. 21-23.

[12]For a detailed description of these authors see Law (1976: 69-89).

[13]H. Atundaolu, 'A short traditional history of the Ijeshas and other hinterland tribes', *Lagos Weekly Record,* June-July 1906 (6 parts); personal communication by J. D. Y. Peel, June 1988. One could construe the linkage between local rulers and educated history writers as a survival of the factional politics in Lagos of the 1880s-1890s, whereby different ethnic groups within the town adhered strongly to their ethnic home-towns. In the light of what I have said before, I do not believe this to be the case, however. In my opinion, the development of an ethnic provincialist approach to history was new.

[14]See Akinyẹle (1911), Oyerinde (1934), Afọlabi (1938). Oyerinde was an educationalist and the first educated member of the Ogbomọṣọ Municipal Council; Afọlabi was the secretary of the Ọyọ Progressive Union, a political organisation of the 1930s.

[15]Macaulay Papers, University of Ibadan Library.

[16]Ṣolankẹ (1931a, 1931b). A. K. Ajiṣafẹ's unpublished contributions to the debate were *Unrighteous and Iniquitous Decree* (1931), and *The Errors and Defeat of Ladipo Ṣolankẹ* (1931).

[17]For an elaborate discussion of political developments in Yorubaland after 1940 in conjunction with ethnic identities see Peel (1989).

'Yoruba Origins' Revisited by Muslims: An interview with the *Arọ́kin* of Ọ̀yọ́ and a reading of the *Aṣl Qabā'il Yūrubā* of *Al-Ḥājj* Ādam al-Ilūrī

P. F. de Moraes Farias

The theme of 'origins' was central to early Yoruba 'cultural nationalism.' In the 1890s, it allowed Christianity to be projected back by Rev. Samuel Johnson into the putative matrices of Yoruba culture. And it affirmed the common identity, grounded on traditions of common descent, of polities opposed to one another in the nineteenth century (Johnson, 1921: vii, 1-16, 40-41). In the 1920s after the delayed publication of Johnson's work, his Ọ̀yọ́-centred vision of the Yoruba 'nation' was challenged. 'Origins' were again a central ideological arena during this challenge, which enhanced the image of Ilé Ifẹ̀ as the focus of pan-Yoruba identity (Law, 1976: 77-8; Peel, 1989: 209). As will be seen in this study, accounts of origin remain in our own day a choice terrain for negotiations of identity, and issues addressed by the early Christian cultural nationalists are on the agenda of contemporary Yoruba Muslims.

Christian interpretations of Ọ̀yọ́ court traditions, and of dynastic and *Ifá* traditions focused on Ilé Ifẹ̀ (see Johnson, 1921: 33; Dennett, 1968: 89; Horton, 1979: 138-9), have provided ideological support for Yoruba ethnic solidarity and distinctiveness. But these interpretations have on board a vast amount of materials from Muslim repertoires, which were found embedded in those 'pagan' oral traditions, or which were taken out of context from Muḥammad Bello's *Infāq al-Maysūr* via Clapperton's *Travels and Discoveries* (Johnson, 1921: 5). These materials have of course remained directly available to Yoruba Muslims, for reinterpretations of their own. Muslim reinterpretations can give a new slant to the image of Yoruba common identity, while continuing to share symbolic resources with the Christian cultural nationalists. Yoruba Muslims have the option of reappropriating that image of common identity instead of rejecting it as alien to themselves. We will see that the reappropriation may be directed not only against Yoruba Christian ideology, but also against Fulani and Hausa Muslim views.

In the report on *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba Country* (1910) compiled by Henry Carr, Obadiah Johnson, Adégbóyèga Ẹdun (see Pallinder's paper in this volume), and other representative figures of the Yoruba Christian élite, the expression 'Yoruba country' was used in a comprehensive sense which included the Ọ̀yọ́ as well as other 'tribes'. Nevertheless, the compilers of the report felt it natural to